The Red Button

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CHAPTER I.

The Boarders.

Regarding the events of that rainy autumn evening at Mrs. Moore's boarding-house in the far West Twenties of New York, accounts differ somewhat—although not enough, after all, but what we may piece together a connected story. Until the great event, they were trivial. It was the reflected light of the tragedy which gave them their importance.

Most of the boarders remained indoors, since it was too wet in the early evening for faring out-of-doors with comfort. After dinner, Miss Harding and Miss Jones, stenographers, who shared a room-and-alcove on the second floor, entertained "company" in the parlor on the ground floor—two young office-mates who figure but dimly in this tale. These callers came at eight o'clock. A few minutes later Professor Noll joined them. Professor Noll was a diet delusionist, the assistant editor of a health-food magazine. He lived on the third floor, across the hall from Captain Hanska.

Miss Harding and Miss Jones had not arrived at that point with their young men where they wanted to visit alone. When Professor Noll entered and suggested music, they welcomed him. He sat down to the piano, therefore, and they all sang the foolish ephemeral songs of the picture-shows. Mrs. Moore stood in the hall for a time, listening. Once or twice she left momentarily to look after towels, furnace-heat and other housewifely cares. One of these tours took her to the top of the house, where Miss Estrilla, the lady sick with weak eyes, lived in a half-darkened room. She was a newcomer, this Miss Estrilla, and not yet well enough to take her meals in the dining-room. Miss Estrilla's brother, a slim, mercurial little Latin with an entertaining trick of the tongue, was reading to her by a shaded lamp, as he often did of evenings. When Mrs. Moore rejoined the others, they were singing full-voice.

On the stairs Mrs. Moore met Captain Hanska passing up from his late and solitary dinner. He was a little irregular about meals, and this evening he had come in, demanding dinner, after everything was cleared away. Half the boarding-house liked Captain Hanska, and half disliked him. Rather (and more accurately) all half-liked and half-hated him.

Before he started up the stairs he paused an instant at the parlor door and looked upon the singers.

"Come on in—the water's fine!" called Miss Harding jocularly.

Captain Hanska returned no answer. Apparently one of his sardonic gibes was on his lips, but he let it die there. And he turned away.

"He can certainly be a grouch when he wants to," said Miss Harding, as though apologizing to the young men.

"Fierce!" exclaimed Miss Jones. And they resumed their singing. As Captain Hanska passed Mrs. Moore on the lower flight of stairs, his head was bent and he gave no sign of recognition.

Mrs. Moore did not leave the parlor, she testified afterward, until Mr. Lawrence Wade called, asking for

"Some Sort of Rumpus Going On Up There."

Captain Hanska. As on previous occasions, he gave her his card, which read: "Mr. Lawrence Wade, Curfew Club." He had called before; whether two or three times, Mrs. Moore's memory would never serve to tell. But she recognized him perfectly—she would have known him anywhere, she said.

Mrs. Moore carried the card to Captain Hanska's room on the third floor.

"What is it?" he growled, as she knocked.

"Mr. Wade to see you," she replied.

She remembered afterward that he paused for an instant before he answered; also she heard a rustling as though some one were moving about.

"I've gone to bed," he said after a pause. "Where is he? Down-stairs?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then show him up," said the Captain, "but say I've gone to bed."

Mrs. Moore turned back to summon Mr. Wade; as she did so, Mr. Estrilla came down from the floor above.

"Oh, good evening, Mr. Estrilla!" said Mrs. Moore. "Did your sister—"

Just then the voice of Captain Hanska broke in from behind the door.

"Wait a minute. Ask Mr. Wade if he minds my not getting up. I've a cold and I've taken some medicine."

"Very well, Captain," replied Mrs. Moore. Estrilla, seeing that she was engaged, went on down-stairs to the front door.

This narrative has gone, so far, from the point of view of Mrs. Moore. We will shift now to Miss Harding; for a time let her mind be the crystal of our thought. A moment before Mrs. Moore came back and told Mr. Wade that Captain Hanska would see him, Mr. Estrilla appeared at the door of the parlor. Although they had seen but little of him at Mrs. Moore's, he was popular for a Latin lightness of temperament, a cheerful and winning smile, a nimble wit which lost nothing because of his quaint accent, and various, winsome, actor tricks which Mrs. Moore called "capers." At that moment they were singing "Yip-hi addy-hi-ay," then in its first run. Mr. Estrilla, bundled up in hat and mackintosh, cut a curvet in the hall, kicked out one of his small Andalusian feet, joined a note of the chorus in a pleasant, light, tenor voice, changed to a falsetto tone which was plainly an imitation of Miss Harding's singing, and whirled toward the outer door. Miss Harding called:

"Come in and sing!" But Mr. Estrilla only pivoted through the door, calling:

"Buenos noches—yip-hi-addy-hi-ay!"

Perhaps five minutes later, Miss Harding went up-stairs for a handkerchief. For a moment she was absent-minded—a rare thing with her—so that instead of turning on the second floor, where her room was situated, she continued another flight and brought up, suddenly aware of her mistake, at the third-floor landing. Something held her there for a moment—the sound of high words from Captain Hanska's room. Miss Harding paused longer than necessary. She was an honorable girl enough, but the most honorable of us pay instinctive tribute to our curiosity.

"I tell you both I won't!" came Captain Hanska's rather harsh voice.

"Oh, I think perhaps I can make you change your mind," came other accents which, Miss Harding reflected, went perfectly with the personality of Mr. Lawrence Wade.

"Some sort of a rumpus going on up there," said Miss Harding as she regained the parlor. Then remembering that she must account to Miss Jones for her presence on the third floor—the bachelor quarters of the establishment—she added vaguely, "You can hear it just as plain!"

They had all stopped singing from very weariness of voice, and Mrs. Moore and Professor Noll had retired to leave the young couples alone with their devices, when Mr. Wade appeared again in the hall—this time on his way out. Every one saw him plainly, especially Miss Harding, who sat facing the door.

"Look who's here, Essie!" she whispered in an undertone to Miss Jones. As she recalled it afterward, he seemed a little pale. He cast no more than one quick absent glance at the group by the piano; and the door closed behind him. Within ten minutes, the "company" left and the young women went to their room. There was silence in the house.

Silence until half past two o'clock—and then Tommy North, who occupied the third floor front, came home from a stag smoker drunk.

This was not the first time that he had returned, uncertain of tongue and foot, in the hours of vice. On the last occasion, he made so much noise that Miss Harding refused him her countenance for a week and Mrs. Moore gave him warning. That warning rested at the bottom of his maudlin psychology as he crept up to the front door, unlocked it, and stole within.

The vigilant Mrs. Moore, who woke at every night entrance of lodgers, leaped out of bed, opened her door a crack, and observed Tommy as he stood balancing himself under the dim point of the gas-jet. Oblivious to the open door and the watchful eye, he made a turn about the newel-post and began putting one foot cautiously before the other, saying over and over a drunken refrain which ran:

"Hay foot—straw foot—one goes up and the other goes down." So he vanished from the vision of Mrs. Moore. By similar devices he negotiated the stretch of hall carpet on the second floor, and took the next flight. He was near his haven now—his own room, third floor front. In the dim hall light, he balanced himself and let his tongue play again.

"Energy and perseverance—victory almost won," he said. "Just talk to your feet and let 'em do your work." But the muscular effort of climbing two flights had sent his liquor surging to his head, so that he dizzied and staggered. He caught the banister for support. Then something, real or fancied, caught his eye—something which held his drunken attention. He stooped and clutched at it. The effort overbalanced him and sent him sprawling on his hands into some wet sticky substance.

"Fearful careless housekeeping," he said as he regained his feet, "forces me to extreme measure wiping hands on shirt. No other place to wipe hands. Renewed necessity arises"—he stopped and repeated the phrase with inordinate delight—"renewed necessity for reaching own room." He caught the knob as he fell, and the barrier opened, letting him tumble on his own motion to the floor. He kicked the door shut as he lay prostrate, and then managed to pull himself upright and reach the electric-light button—for Mrs. Moore burned gas in the halls for economy, but electric lights in the rooms. The two tumbles had thrown him into another state of consciousness; his head began to clear and his motions to steady. So he turned, his predicament still in his mind, to the wash-stand in the corner.

Above it hung a mirror. In passing, Tommy's gaze swept the glass, leaped back, caught on what blanched his

"Never Mind Who I Am. Look at This."

face to a sickly white, what steadied his unsteady figure until it stood straight and stiff, what cleared his head so violently that he could think with all the swiftness of terror.

On his dress shirt-front was the imprint of a huge red hand.

"Whose?" Tommy asked himself one instant. The next, his gaze bounded from the mirror to his own hands.

Blood mired his fingers. On his coat was blood, on his sleeve was blood, on his knees was blood, on his very shoes. He looked at the mirror again. Across his chin zigzagged a dark red line—blood also.

His first sane thought was that he had cut himself, and was bleeding to death. He looked again at his hands, but saw no wound. Then, drunken memories lingering a little in his sober mind, he remembered the fall and the process of wiping his hands. He ran back to the hallway, turned up the pin-point of light on the gas-jet. There it was, a thin stream of blood, spotted a little where he had fallen in it. And it was widest where it began its flow—at the threshold of Captain Hanska's door. In a weak access of real terror, he fell to pounding on the wall and shouting:

"Murder! Murder!"

Suddenly mastering himself, he seized the knob of Captain Hanska's door. The latch gave way—it was not locked. But it opened no more than a foot or two—scarcely enough to give a man passage—when something blocked it from behind. In the temporary weakness of his will, Tommy North shrank back from entering such a place of veritable horror. He shouted again; and now Professor Noll, looking in his bathrobe like a strange priest of a strange Eastern rite, rushed from his room gasping:

"What's the matter?"

The blood, the pale, gibbering, dabbled young man, were explanation enough. He himself opened the door as far as it could go, and edged into the room.

"Matches, quick!" he called from within. Tommy North found his match-case; and the mastery of another mind, with the example of better courage, drew him after Professor Noll. He lighted a match, held it up. It flared and blazed until it burned his fingers. In that flickering transitory light they saw all that it was necessary to see.

Captain Hanska's body blocked the door. He lay dressed in his pajamas, the shrunken relic of what had been a portly man—lay on his back with his hands lifted over his head as though he were clutching at the air. From his breast stuck the haft of a great knife; and from the wound the pool of blood flowed to the threshold. The match went out; and with a common impulse Tommy North and Professor Noll struggled to see who would be the first to get back through that door.

There followed alarms, screams, the running of women, hysterics on the part of Mrs. Moore, who had started from bed at Tommy's first cry. Tommy North, albeit ordinarily a brave and resourceful young man enough, was of no use in this crisis, what with the compression of ten emotional years into ten minutes of life. Worse for him, the hen-minded Mrs. Moore, seeing the blood, cried, "You murderer!" clutched at his coat, and fell into a faint. Upon Professor Noll devolved the masculine guidance of this affair. And he thought first, not of the police, but of a doctor. By this time, Miss Harding and Miss Jones were weeping breast to breast; Mrs. Moore had recovered to say that she always expected it of Mr. North, and Miss Estrilla, the invalid lady on the top floor, had called from the head of the stairs, "What is it?" With the brutality which impels us in crises to confide unpalliated horrors, some one shrieked, "Hanska's murdered!" There came from above some Spanish ejaculations to which no one paid much attention, and then a rattling of the hook of the telephone, which hung on a door-post in that fourth-floor hall.

Professor Noll, his mind still on the necessity for calling a doctor, slipped into ulster and bed-shoes and rushed across the street to rouse the house physician in the apartment-hotel. He was some time making himself known and understood. As he neared his own door again, he saw Mr. Estrilla entering almost on the run.

"There's been a murder! Captain Hanska's killed!" Professor Noll called after him.

"I know—my seester 'lephone—she is frighten!" Estrilla called back shrilly over his shoulder. And he hurried up the stairs.

By this time, the open door, the flittering lights, the screams and hysterics, had begun to attract the attention of this and that late pedestrian. A milkman pulled up, hitched, and entered; and then a night-faring printer. Presently the little knot in the street and the parlors was augmented by a woman, fully and rather over-luxuriously dressed, as though for the theater—a big picture hat and a black satin, fur-edged evening coat over a light gown which showed here and there the glitter of sequins. She was a large but shapely woman of uncertain age; yet so pleasing withal that the gathering loafers, even in the excitement of a murder, spared a few admiring glances at her face.

"I'm goin' up," she confided to her fellows. "I belong there—they need a sensible woman, from the way they're screechin'. You better not follow—you'll do no good an' it might git you involved." With surprising lightness, considering her bulk, she mounted the stairs.

The noise guided her to the focus of interest; she pushed her way into the room of the late Captain Hanska, and stood looking about with a pair of large serious eyes which took in every detail. She bent her gaze on the dead man, stooped, made quick examination, first of the wound and then of his face. Both Mrs. Moore and Miss Harding were about to ask this stranger to account for herself, when the doctor, half-dressed but carrying his bag, edged past the door. All turned to him. He looked but an instant on the face.

"He's dead," he said calmly. "Has any one notified the police? Has any one called up a Coroner?"

"I'll attend to that," volunteered the strange woman, with an air of perfect competence and command; "where's the phone—ground floor and top floor hall? All right; I'll use the top floor; that's nearer. Any particular Coroner, Doctor? Lipschutz? All right."

In the hall, she met the regular patrolman, who had received the news at last. The limb of the law had forbidden the augmented crowd at the door to follow him; he was ascending alone. The sight of this woman in

her fashionable clothes—or was it her compelling look of command—stopped him.

"Listen," she said, "there's only a second. Never mind who I am. Look at this." She produced the old and worn piece of paper which she had drawn from her bag a minute before.

"To the police," it read. "Any matter that concerns the bearer, Mrs Rosalie Le Grange, is to be referred to me. I request you to give her the greatest discretion.

"INSPECTOR MARTIN M'GEE."

"Not a word," pursued Rosalie Le Grange. "Now mind I didn't see this thing, an' I don't knew as much about it as you. But it's your job to tip me off to the reserves as soon as they come—make them understand that they ain't to stop me whatever I do. And remember"—now the woman smiled in a meaning way—"you got here just as quick as you could—not a second later—I'll stick to that. Now get inside." She waited a moment, before she followed him.

At that moment, Senor Estrilla came down the stairs from his sister's room. He had opened his raincoat, but it was still wet. He had turned up his hat brim, but an occasional drop fell.

"My seester is better," he said. "Oh, can I assist?" And while he helped the men to cover the body, he listened to scattered explanations from the women.

Now the reserves had come; and after them, the Coroner and the detectives. They cleared out the house, holding only those who seemed to them pertinent witnesses. At a signal from Rosalie Le Grange they detained her for a time, on the ground that she had arrived suspiciously early. The first unorganized search for the criminal simmered down to Tommy North, although even Mrs. Moore admitted that he had entered only a minute before the body was discovered. In the midst of the investigation, a new quandary presented itself. The house was to be sealed while the police investigated. The innocent would have to find some other dwelling-place. That suited her, Miss Harding remarked; she wouldn't sleep there again; whereupon Mrs. Moore, declaring she was ruined, fell again to weeping. And suddenly she who called herself Madame Le Grange stepped forward into the huddled distressed group.

"I haven't introduced myself," she said, with easy masterful calm, "but I've just opened the house at 442 as a boarding-house. You ain't going to hold me, of course"—this to the police—"and, anyhow, you know where to find me in case you want me. There's room to-night in my house for you all." She turned, with her eternal air of mistress in any situation, to Miss Harding. "Come, dress and pack up your night things, my dear. We can move your trunks to-morrow." Mechanically, Miss Harding obeyed, and then Miss Jones. Suddenly Mr. Estrilla, who had been ministering to Mrs. Moore by the door, spoke up and asked:

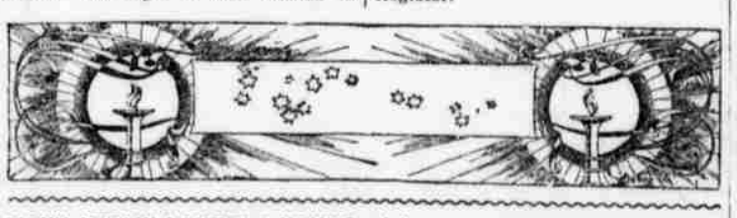
"My seester, too?"

"She's sick, ain't she?" inquired Mrs. Le Grange, as if for an instant that gave her pause. "Then the poor thing needs it worst of all!" she answered her own argument. "Come on!" She dashed away, lightly in spite of her bulk, Estrilla following.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Spineless.

"Yes," said Mrs. Twickembury, "you seldom see Mr. Twickembury without a cigar in his mouth. He's a most invertebrate smoker."—The Christian Register.



MANY ATTAIN LAURELS YOUNG

Long List of Those Men Who Have Achieved Fame Before the Age of Thirty.

In his dignified tribute to Perry, former President Taft called attention to the fact that he hero of Lake Erie was only twenty-eight when he won that glorious victory. An interesting roll might be called of the men who achieved deathless fame while yet in their twenties, says the St. Louis Republic, editorially. First of all, we suppose, would be Alexander, who had vanquished the world, and for whom Fate flashed the doleful sign "nothing doing" ere yet he was hardly thirty. The hang of his toga was still a matter of vast concern to the foppish Caesar when he was pushing his triremes across the channel to the chalk cliffs of Brittany. At twenty-eight the youth of Napoleon was far behind and kings had learned to come down and personally open the door when he knocked. Burns was singing his last songs at twenty-eight and Byron awoke to acclaim while still younger. The dead boy in a garret, eighteen or thereabouts, was Chatterton. Emmett named the terms on which his epitaph might be written "in the brave days when he was twenty-one."

Slamming the door on history and sauntering out into the golden light of the living day, it is a pleasure to reflect that at twenty-eight John D. Rockefeller was about as poor and honest as the rest of us, and athwart the smoke-wreathed skyline of Pittsburgh no prophet could discern the roof of a Carnegie library. But those are negative views. By way of citing the positive, we observe that Tyrus Cobb had put a flashing spike on the home plate of immortality while still under twenty-eight.

But of arms and the men, and letters and pelf and politics, enough! As a matter of fact and justice be it declared that the name of women who attain their greatest beauty without ever admitting twenty-eight is legion—and will continue to be.

Never Causes a Jar.

What kind of money will never cause family quarrels?

Harmony.

WHAT TO DO WITH LEFTOVERS

Hash More Palatable, Though Less Economical, Than Meat Brought to the Table Cold.

I suppose that in most households a dish of hash comes to the table at least once a week. Hash is very nice, and many people prefer it to cold meat. But it is one of the least economical things going, because half a pound of meat cuts up into very little mince, and people take a larger helping of done-up things than they would of cold meat in slices. Therefore, if you want to be economical, don't have hash.

But, if you are going to have it, you might as well make it properly. Do it in the following way and it will be perfectly delicious:

Remove all fat and gristle from your meat. Chop it by hand, or put it through a machine. If you use a meat chopper you must put a crust of bread through afterwards, in order to clean out all the little bits of meat which have stuck to the works. If you don't do this you will leave quite a lot of meat on the knives, and it will be all wasted.

Melt one ounce of butter in a pan. When this is melted, stir into it one ounce of flour, and add half a pint of stock or milk. Cook the mixture for ten minutes, stirring it very carefully all the time and making sure that it does not turn lumpy. When it is done it will be a very thick sauce.

Take the pan off the fire, stir the minced meat into it and flavor the whole with parsley, herbs or tomato sauce.

Put the pan back on the fire, and stir the contents till it is quite hot. Don't let your mince come to the boil on any account though, or it will be spoiled. Take it off, turn it out on a hot dish, and decorate it with snippets of toast. It will be firm enough to stand up in a pile. A good cook makes her dishes nice to taste, pretty to look at, and easy to serve and enjoy.—Exchange.

CURRY SAUCE WORTH TRYING

Approved Recipe, Not Especially Difficult to Make, Will Be Found to Give Satisfaction.

Curried meats and vegetables are delicious. Here is a recipe for a good curry sauce that is not especially difficult to make. It can be served with left-over chicken, cut in little strips, and heated in the curry, then put on a platter with a ring or mold of hot rice. It can be served with left-over mutton or lamb, cut in dice or thin slices. It can be served with several vegetables. To make it, slice a medium-sized onion thin and fry it in two ounces of butter. When it is brown add a dessertspoonful of curry powder. Let it cook a minute or two and then add a cupful of beef gravy. Dish gravy from roast beef or beefsteak is the best sort, but if this is not at hand beef stock will do. Add also twelve whole cloves, a clove of gralic, a strip or two of lemon peel, a half teaspoonful of salt, two bay leaves and a teaspoonful or two of tarrangon vinegar. Cook this gently for half an hour and then strain it.

Excellent Stock.

If all the bones that are trimmed from the roast either at the market or at home, are cracked and put into a kettle they will make an excellent basis for rich gravies or a soup. To every pound of bones allow a quart of cold water, a carrot, turnip, two tomatoes, an onion and a stalk or two of celery, all the vegetables cut into small pieces. Simmer slowly until the soup has been reduced about half. Then cool, skim and strain.

How to Clean Wall Paper.

Take one quart of flour, one and one-half tablespoons powdered alum and one pint of cold water. Sift the alum with the flour and mix with the water, and cook until thoroughly done, stirring constantly.

Turn it out on the bread board and mix into it one-half cup of flour. Break off pieces of the cleaner and use as you would a cloth. This will make your wall paper look like new.

Hose in Sink.

If the dishes are washed in the sink attach pieces of white rubber hose to the faucets, of convenient lengths, to carry the water over all the dishes. This will be found to be very convenient, and also save dishes that might otherwise be broken by striking against the faucets.

Olive Oil for Shoes.

Patent leather shoes may be kept in good condition during the cold weather by rubbing them with a little olive oil and polishing with a piece of Canton flannel. This will keep the leather from cracking and the shoes will always appear new.

Best Way to Clean Carpet.

There is nothing better than newspapers, wrung out of water and torn in bits, for cleaning a dusty carpet; scatter over the floor before sweeping. They will gather more dust than you would imagine was there.

Makes a Good Gravy.

Fry a few slices of breakfast bacon, mix a large spoonful of flour with the dripping, add a pint of milk and as much water. Stir until smooth and thick. This makes a good gravy.

To Keep Cranberries Fresh.

To keep cranberries, put them in glass jars, fill the latter to overflowing with cold water, and screw the tops on tightly. In this way the cranberries will remain fresh all winter.